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Soviet Pilot Defector on KAL Shoot-Down

Viktor Belenko, a former Soviet pilot who defected to Japan in an ultra-secret MiG-25 in 1976, says the Russians were fully aware that they were shooting down a civilian aircraft when they murdered 269 people aboard Korean Air Lines flight 007 last September.

In an exclusive article for the January *Reader's Digest*, Belenko, who prior to his defection had flown the same kind of Su-15 interceptor that destroyed the Korean airliner, relates that whenever a foreign aircraft moves within 100 kilometers of Soviet airspace, it is continuously tracked and its movements recorded at the National Command Center near Moscow. He adds that a standing order *approved by the Politburo* requires the Soviet Air Defense Command to force or shoot down any foreign aircraft, military or civilian, that strays into Russian airspace.

The former pilot, who at U.S. government request analyzed the recorded words of the Russians who stalked the ill-fated airliner, declares that virtually every substantive statement Moscow has made to justify its action "is demonstrably false."

In particular, he says that there is no way the Soviets could have mistaken the Korean 747 for a U.S. RC-135 reconnaissance plane, as they initially claimed. He notes that the Soviets track both types of plane on an almost daily basis in international airspace off the coast of the Kamchatka peninsula and that they "well know that the 747 cruises at least 125 knots faster than the RC-135 flies." Hence "the speed alone of KAL 007 unmistakably told the Soviets that it was not an RC-135. And Soviet radar stations recorded and reported this speed for more than two hours."